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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: RESPONSE TO
REPRESENTATIVE ON THE FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA HARASZTI

¶1. (U) Post is authorized to present the following statement at the April 2 Permanent Council meeting in Vienna.

Begin text:

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman,

We are pleased once again to welcome to the Permanent Council the Representative on Freedom of the Media. Mr. Haraszti, you have set a standard for promotion of media freedom that brings credit to this organization. You have been tireless in your efforts to bring forth best practices, encourage the growth of independent media, keep the Internet free, and engage with all participating States on issues that touch on our OSCE commitments to freedom of expression. The United States urges you to continue to sound freedom's trumpet in all corners of the OSCE region.

Your current report is a sobering document. As you have warned us before, violence against media workers is the greatest threat to freedom of the press. When those who murder, assault or intimidate media workers feel that they can do so without fear of consequences, the stage is set for a roll-back of freedom, in defiance of mutually agreed OSCE norms and principles. Just since your last report to us in November, many new cases have taken place in our region, documented by your office or by other credible international sources such as Reporters without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

We don't have time in this meeting to do justice to the issue, given the overwhelming number of cases of violence against journalists since your last report to this Council just six months ago. But let me assure each one of these journalists who has been victimized because of his or her work, and their families, that the United States stands with you, condemns the violence that has been used to intimidate you and will work tirelessly to overcome these abuses against freedom of expression by the media.

Madame Chairwoman, Mr. Haraszti has sought to warn us time and again that violence and intimidation need to be energetically dealt with by governing and judicial authorities, who bear responsibility to act against perpetrators and dispel the climate of impunity that regrettably seems to exist now in some of our participating States. The United States urges participating States to undertake thorough and transparent investigations, and to create the conditions that will assure the safety of journalists.

At the same time, we cannot ignore a host of other challenges to media freedom that Mr. Haraszti also has well documented. The United States strongly believes that the decriminalization of libel is good policy and urges all our OSCE partners to work towards that goal. The United States raises its voice once again to urge all our OSCE partners to permit international broadcasters easy access to the public especially in countries where independent media are still developing. The United States further urges participating

States to eschew state regulation of the profession of journalism, to allow unimpeded operation of news organizations, and to adopt best practices amply documented by Mr. Haraszti's office, such as providing the public with access to official information, police handling of media workers at political demonstrations, and leaving journalists free to develop their own voluntary codes and standards of conduct without interference by the state.

Finally, we want to express our particular concern at measures being taken in several participating States against international broadcasters such as RFE/RL, Voice of America and the BBC. Assault and intimidation of their correspondents and manipulation of regulatory structures to restrict their access to the public harms the development of civil society, which is an underpinning of the openness and transparency of states that we recognize in shared OSCE commitments as necessary to mutual security and cooperation.

Mr. Haraszti, thank you again for your valuable work. We hope that your next report can bring us evidence of participating States taking seriously the shortcoming you have convincingly documented to us today.

Thank you, Madame Chairwoman.
CLINTON